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Idaho ponders having prisoners sleep in shifts

Wed Jan 11, 2006 9:37 AM ET

By Shea Andersen

BOISE, Idaho (Reuters) - With space scarce as the U.S. prison population grows, a top Idaho lawmaker is proposing that inmates share beds by sleeping in shifts, a practice sometimes used by the U.S. military.

"Why does every inmate need his or her own bed?" asked State Sen. Robert Geddes. "The military does it all the time."

The issue arises as Idaho and other states stiffen penalties for drug-related crimes, putting a premium on prison space. Idaho has nearly 7,000 inmates, and that number is growing by nearly 7 percent a year.

Geddes, the Republican president of the State Senate, said taxpayers should not be responsible for the cost of transferring prisoners out of state, as Idaho does to ease overcrowding.

"The costs are tremendous," Geddes said in an interview.

Since unveiling his plan last week, he said he has received calls from inmate families who like the idea of having their incarcerated relatives closer to home instead of out of state.

But Idaho Corrections Division Director Tom Beauclair said on Tuesday that the idea would create more problems than it would solve.

"It would actually double the population at a facility," Beauclair said. "I don't have the staff to handle it. If you have an emergency, where do you put people?"

A prison overcrowding expert said the concept has been discussed for years but remains completely untested.

"I can't think of any correctional facility where people share a bunk," said Robert Sigler, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Alabama.

He warned that courts have tended to frown on prisons that are crowding their inmates, whether they have a bed or not. "It's not how many times you rotate that bed, it's how much living space you provide," Sigler said.

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GrandForksHerald.com

Posted on Fri, Jan. 27, 2006

Legislators discuss options for prison space

Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. - Legislators are trying to make sense of different predictions on the number of prisoners the state can expect as they consider more prison space.

State Corrections Director LeAnn Bertsch said this week that at the current annual growth rate of about 17 percent, North Dakota's population of women prisoners could reach 831 by 2017, a 450 percent increase.

The male prison population, increasing more slowly at about 6 percent annually, would jump from 1,249 now to 2,362 by 2017.

"Hopefully, that never transpires," Bertsch told legislators Thursday.

Other projections are much lower. Bertsch said estimates are little more than guesswork given changes in the types of crimes people commit, judges' sentencing practices and other variables.

Legislators are considering a number of options, including remodeling current prisons in Bismarck and Jamestown, replacing or expanding parts of the State Penitentiary in Bismarck at a cost estimated at \$31 million, and building a new Bismarck facility for 2,000 inmates at an estimated cost of \$119 million.

"How do you know 2,000 is the right number?" asked Rep. Al Carlson, R-Fargo, who chairs the Legislature's interim Budget Committee on Government Services.

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State budget strategy: Build private prisons

Possible strategy calls for housing short-term parole violators in county facilities

By Andy Furillo
Inside Bay Area

SACRAMENTO — Driven by a rising inmate population, prison spending in California is scheduled to exceed \$8 billion this year. But the real intrigue in the state's 2006-07 corrections budget is in what it's proposing for the near-and long-term future.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's summary on the spending plan details a proposal "to pursue authority to secure additional inmate capacity through contracts with other providers." The wording is out of the actual budget bill, which calls for nearly doubling the number of private prison beds in California, from the current 8,500 to an estimated 17,000 over the next two years.

Schwarzenegger's "strategic growth plan," meanwhile, lays out a bond-funded, decadelong, \$12 billion jail and prison construction proposal that would create space for 83,000 additional inmates. About a third of that number — 27,000 — are projected to be short-term parole violators who would be housed in county facilities instead of in state prisons, according to the governor's Department of Finance.

Together, the shift of the parolees to county jails and the construction of the new private prison beds would eliminate the need for at least seven prisons — based on the current population average of about 5,000 per institution — that would otherwise have to be built to house the projected inmate increase over the next decade.

Already, the proposals have raised red flags with the politically influential California Correctional Peace Officers Association. The union represents about 30,000 prison officers, but would lose out on thousands of additional dues-paying members if the administration follows through with its private prisons and county jails plan.

"I think this proposal means that the governor is taking a pretty courageous stand for good public policy," said Mark Nobill, a lobbyist for Cornell Companies, a private prison firm that operates two correctional facilities on contract with the state and is likely to take the administration's invitation to bid this year on some upcoming contracts.

"While these facilities have some of the best recidivism reduction plans and can be brought online quickly to alleviate overcrowding, the fact of the matter is that the prison guards union is threatened by these programs," he said. "It takes a real man to stand up to the guards and not deal away these programs."

The governor's \$8.1 billion proposed budget for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in fiscal year 2006-07 represents a 5.5 percent increase over the previous year's spending.

A population that is expected to top 170,000 adult inmates by the middle of next year accounts for most of the increase.

Last year, the department came in for some heated rebukes for adding the word "rehabilitation" to its name while at the same time removing tens of millions of dollars the prison system's vocational and educational programs. This year, the agency has increased rehabilitation program spending by \$53 million.

"We needed to go in and do an evaluation to make sure the money was being invested properly and wisely," department spokesman J.P. Tremblay said. "We needed to look at putting in vocational programs like masonry, forklift driving and carpentry, so when inmates get out, they will have an opportunity to get a job and be successful. This year, we'll be putting money into programs that have proved that they work."

Settlements in four separate federal court cases have forced an increase of the budget by more than \$120 million this year and through 2006-07. The settlements include \$60 million for a juvenile justice remedial plan, \$22 million for inmate dental care, \$25 million for increased adult prison medical staffing and \$21 million more to pay for defense lawyers to represent parolees facing revocation, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office. Those figures do not account for another \$70 million in court-ordered pay raises for prison nurses and doctors.

The budget includes \$75 million to train new correctional officers over the next year. The cadet program is being expanded from the current training center in Galt to include the deactivated Northern California Women's Facility in Stockton to fill 2,000 vacancies. The vacancies are expected to double to 4,000 when prison officers take advantage of pension enhancements scheduled to take effect this year.

State Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, chairwoman of the corrections oversight committee, said she has "mixed feelings" over the budget. She said she's happy "that the big 'r' is back — rehabilitation." But Romero ripped the budget plan for the Division of Juvenile Justice as "a complete failure," saying it provides no details on how the agency plans to overhaul operations for the system that houses about 3,100 wards in what used to be the California Youth Authority.

"They have no plan," Romero said.

The juvenile program does call for opening more housing units at the system's eight youth prisons to decrease their per capita populations, and the budget is adding more than 300 positions to lower the ratio of staff to inmates — changes that emulate programs in Missouri and Colorado that California officials have held up as models.

But the budget says nothing about changing the philosophical approach toward juvenile incarceration in California, nor does it suggest drastically reducing the overall ward population or returning the young offenders back to their home counties so they can get treatment closer to home. Nor does it call for shutting down the troubled N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility in Stockton.

As for the adult prison population, Romero said it might be time to look at imposing a cap on it. Some of the prison system's harshest critics, meanwhile, view Schwarzenegger's call for the two new institutions as a reversal of the correctional policies he laid out during his first two years in office that were focused on reducing recidivism with new parole programs.

Rose Braz of Californians United for a Responsible Budget, a Bay Area coalition that is trying to reduce prison spending, said the move toward private prisons and housing state parolees in county jails still represents "a complete abandonment of all the governor's pledges to reform corrections," even if it means the state will build only two prisons instead of nine.

"I think the governor is really falling back on failed policies," Braz said.

AT A GLANCE

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's long-term strategy for prisons proposes a bond-funded, decade long, \$12 billion jail and prison construction plan that would create space for 83,000 more inmates.

- About a third of those are projected to be short-term parole violators who would go to county facilities instead of state prisons.
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1 in 5 in juvenile corrections end up in state prisons

TERRY WOSTER
twoster@midco.net

January 16, 2006, 2:55 am

PIERRE - A decade-long look at juvenile corrections in South Dakota shows that one in five young people committed to those programs eventually ends up in the state's adult prison, a state youth-services official told legislators Friday.

Doug Hermann, director of juvenile services for South Dakota's Corrections Department, said his agency reviewed the case files of 3,349 juveniles who had been in any Department of Corrections youth program since 1996.

The review showed that 14.4 percent of those released from juvenile programs found their way into the adult system within three years. Another 4.2 percent ended up in the adult prison system during the next 6.5 years, Hermann said.

"Another way to look at that is, 81.4 percent didn't end up in the adult system," Hermann told the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee during the DOC budget hearing.

The number of juveniles in the custody of DOC has fallen steadily since fiscal year 2002, agency records show. That year, an average of 1,135 youth were under DOC jurisdiction. In fiscal 2005 the number was 1,001.

The average is projected to be 940 this year and again next year.

Hermann suggested that revamped programs to help young people re-enter their home community have helped. So have policy changes that allow young people to be freed from state custody before they reach the age of 18 if they are doing well on the outside.

"Some policies had kept them under our care until 18," he said.

Of those released early, Hermann said "very few have been recommitted to us."

He told lawmakers that making comparisons with other states in recidivism rates is difficult because states use different reporting system.

The DOC gave lawmakers a document that showed the state's 14.4 percent rate at which juveniles land in the adult system during a three-year period compares with a 30 percent rate in Maryland and 49 percent in Texas, DOC reports show.

Republican Rep. Ted Klautdt of Walker wondered if the state had over-budgeted juvenile programs, since the number of young people in state jurisdiction has dropped.

"I'm not going to agree with that," Hermann said.

He said the cost of programs is based on the services needed, and many of the juveniles entering the state system have significant mental health, sex offense or chemical dependency problems.

"All of those are services that need to be provided and have a cost attached to them," Hermann said.

Posted on Tue, Jan. 10, 2006

Governor calls for prison expansion

BY BILL SALISBURY
Pioneer Press

Citing the need to lock up more dangerous sex offenders and other criminals, Gov. Tim Pawlenty today proposed borrowing \$123.2 million to upgrade and expand state prisons and hospitals.

"We live in a great state, but we need to face the reality that we continue to face dangerous threats, especially in the areas of sex offenders and the scourge of meth," Pawlenty said in news release. "We need to be tough, and this proposal reflects our approach to dealing with those who refuse to follow the law.

The proposal also reflects the bill coming due after state policymakers have spent nearly two decades increasing prison sentences and locking up sex offenders in mental hospitals after they are released from prison.

Minnesota had the fastest-growing prison population of any state in 2004. The number of inmates had increased about 45 percent since 1999, and the state Corrections Department has predicted its prison population would grow another 33 percent to more than 11,000 by 2010.

Pawlenty asked the Legislature for \$70.4 million for prison expansions. The largest project would be a \$28 million expansion and renovation at the Faribault prison, which would increase its capacity to more than 2,000 inmates. That would be in addition to an \$85 million expansion there that was funded last year.

Stillwater prison would get \$19.6 million to build a high-security, 150-bed segregation unit. It would house extremely violent and dangerous prisoners and make room for sex offenders serving longer sentences under a new law enacted last year.

The governor requested \$4.9 million to erect a fence and security system for the Shakopee prison, the state's only lockup for women. He also asked for \$5.4 million for a 92-bed expansion at the women's prison to increase its capacity to 641 inmates.

To house and treat civilly committed sex offenders, the Department of Human Services would get \$52.8 million for new hospital facilities under Pawlenty's plan. The largest project would be a \$44.6 million expansion of Moose Lake state hospital, including a 400-bed secure residential building and treatment space for sexual psychopathic personalities and other sexually dangerous persons.

Pawlenty would give the Corrections and Human Services departments most of the \$140 million they requested for construction projects last summer.

The prison and hospital projects will be part of a bonding bill, financed with money borrowed through the sale of state-backed bonds sold to investors, that Pawlenty is scheduled to unveil next week. Its price tag is expected to be between \$700 million and \$1 billion.

Bill Salisbury can be reached at bsalisbury@pioneerpress.com or (651) 228-5538.

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South 27th never planned as corrections alley

By ED KEMMICK
Of The Gazette Staff

The city of Billings had high hopes for what was then the main entryway into town when it created the South 27th Street Zoning District in 1983.

In the introduction to the plan creating the district, Planning Department staffers said the street would be well-suited to the development of multifamily housing, offices, professional buildings and commercial centers. The introduction also noted that South 27th "creates the first impression of the City for visitors."

"It stands to reason, then," the document continued, "that the street should be an attractive example of Billings and what the City has to offer."

More than 20 years later, what does the city have to offer, judging from developments on South 27th? Plenty of opportunities to be imprisoned or on probation or parole, apparently. At a recent City Council hearing on a proposal to open a methamphetamine treatment unit in Billings - most likely in the Howard Johnson Express Inn on the 1000 block of South 27th - critics of the plan dubbed the street the "correctional corridor."

The transition of South 27th from a hoped-for mix of attractive private development to a string of government-funded institutions did not come about intentionally, said Nicole Cromwell, zoning coordinator with the City-County Planning Department. It happened as a result of market forces beyond anyone's control, she said.

In 1983, when that optimistic forecast for South 27th was written, King Avenue West was relatively undeveloped, nothing like the booming hub of hotels, stores and restaurants that it has since become. Nor was there an I-90 interchange at Shiloh Road. South 27th Street was still the route by which most people entered Billings, especially the downtown.

It was assumed that government-backed improvements to the area would spur further development along the street. Cromwell said some property owners on Garden Avenue, just east of 27th on the south side of I-90, had their land rezoned as highway-commercial, thinking they would cash in on the big development opportunities that seemed to be on the horizon.

The city made costly improvements to South 27th Street, reconstructing the roadway, replacing sewer and water lines and putting in a raised, landscaped median. On city-owned land on either side of the street, ramshackle houses were razed and the city tried selling the land for new housing or other kinds of development.

There were some takers over the years, but not many. On the east side of South 27th there is a handful of small businesses, and the Billings Area Chamber of Commerce occupies a handsome building on the 800 block of the street. There is also a smattering of businesses on the west side of the street, but they are outnumbered by vacant lots.

A foot in the door

The institutionalization of the street began in 1984, when the state began construction of a psychiatric treatment center for youths on the 700 block of South 27th. Just two years later, the building was purchased by a private company that changed it into the Rivendell Psychiatric Center, which also served young people.

The owner of Rivendell closed the business in 1993, blaming a drop in patient numbers on state cuts in Medicaid funding. The state bought back the building in 1994 and converted it into what is now the Montana Women's Prison. The prison started modestly enough, with just 44 inmates, but it didn't take long to reach its emergency capacity of 72.

The prison underwent a major expansion in 2003, when it built a sizeable addition and increased its capacity to 205. But because of overcrowding at jails around the state, the prison population is currently just under its "emergency" capacity of 270, according to Annamae Siegfried-Derrick, the prison's public information officer.

She said the prison, which handles inmates requiring all levels of security and has a staff of 73, has no plans to expand. She said some pressure would be taken off the prison if Alternatives Inc. opens both a diversionary-sentencing program and meth treatment unit near the prison in the Howard Johnson building. It would house as many as 90 women who might otherwise be sentenced to prison.

Siegfried-Derrick said the only two escapes from the Women's Prison occurred shortly after it opened, before the security fence was installed, and both escapees were captured, one within a couple of hours.

Youth detention center

Before the Women's Prison opened, another detention center was built just off the street, at 410 S. 26th St. Now known as Yellowstone County's Ted Lechner Youth Services Center, it was built after two juveniles being held in temporary jail cells on the top floor of the county courthouse committed suicide.

The dual-use building was designed to serve as a detention center for youths awaiting trial or sentencing and an emergency shelter for adolescents escaping abuse or neglect at home. It originally had just four detention cells, and was expanded to eight a short time later. In 1999, it was expanded to its current size - 24 cells and 15 shelter beds. The center also offers extensive outpatient counseling.

Valarie Weber, who has been executive director there for 10 years, said the center takes in youths from all over the state, with an emphasis on the 14-county region surrounding Billings. For those in detention, the average length of stay is about 18 days, though a third of the youths they see are in and out within 48 hours.

Those held on serious charges - including murder, rape and robbery - are sometimes held for as long as a year awaiting trial or some other resolution of their cases. Weber said the Youth Services Center differs from the Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility in Miles City in that it handles youths 12-17 who have been charged but not sentenced. Youths at Pine Hills are sentenced to time there.

Weber said her staff is made up of 37 full-time employees, including 28 counselors who also provide security. "We keep our kids highly supervised," she said.

Neighbors did express some concerns when the youth center was being built, Weber said, but there have been no problems over the years. She said there has never been a suicide in the secure detention facility, or a successful escape.

Probation and parole

A relatively recent addition to South 27th is the Billings office of the Adult Probation and Parole Bureau. Regional Administrator Pam Bunke, who has headed the office for seven years, said it was scattered at three locations, two of them downtown and one on the South Side, until 2002. That's when the office moved into its new building on the 400 block of South 27th.

The office supervises 1,400 people, 1,100 of them from Yellowstone County and 300 from the five surrounding counties, Bunke said. Those include probationers, parolees, people sentenced to the supervision of the Department of Corrections and ex-convicts on conditional release from prison.

On a light day, Bunke said, 400 to 500 people will stop by the office to meet with their probation officer, undergo drug testing or to fulfill some other requirement. Her 22 officers are all licensed to carry guns, and most of them also carry handcuffs and pepper spray. The intake desk is shielded by bulletproof glass, and access to the offices is through security doors.

Bunke said the probation and parole office wanted to be on South 27th for the same reason other institutions do. It's centrally located and easy to reach by bus, which a lot of her clients rely on; it's close to the courthouse, where her officers frequently need to appear; and it's close to both the sheriff's and police offices.

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Alternatives Inc. plans growth of pre-release facilities, services

By ED KEMMICK
Of The Gazette Staff

Alternatives Inc. has plans to expand its pre-release center into a building on South 27th Street whether or not it wins a state contract to put a methamphetamine treatment unit in Billings.

The nonprofit business operates a pre-release center under contract with the state Department of Corrections, allowing convicts to ease their way back into society as they serve out the last months of their sentences. Some people are sentenced directly to pre-release centers as an alternative to prison time.

At its downtown building, at First Avenue North and North 31st Street, Alternatives Inc. is licensed to house 132 men and 25 women. It offers many other services, including electronic monitoring of misdemeanor probationers and counseling and classes on anger management, domestic violence and drug and gambling addictions. It deals with about 4,000 nonresidential clients annually.

Alternatives Inc. has a buy-sell contract on the Howard Johnson Express Inn at 1001 S. 27th St., where it hopes to put its women's pre-release center. The move would allow Alternatives to increase the capacity of the women's pre-release center from 25 to 65. It also wants to take over the Billings Assessment and Sanctions Center from the nearby Women's Prison, which would add space for another 30 women to the building.

Such centers are used by the Department of Corrections to determine the best place to put offenders within the corrections system. By using a screening and assessment center in Missoula, the department was able to divert 73 percent of prison-bound offenders into community corrections programs. Dave Armstrong, the administrator of Alternatives Inc., said it has never made sense to put the Billings center in the prison, since it is intended to divert people away from there.

The last piece of the Howard Johnson project is Alternative Inc.'s hope to secure a state contract to open a meth treatment unit for 40 to 60 female offenders. It would be an alternative to prison for women convicted of their second or subsequent meth-related crime. Armstrong said the state should make a decision on awarding that contract by March 1 at the earliest.

The state's request for proposals said it was seeking not fewer than 80 beds for men and not fewer than 40 for women. A pre-release center in Butte has made a two-part proposal for treatment units in Lewistown, either a 120-bed building with room for men and women or a unit just for 80 men. A Helena pre-release center proposed opening a women's unit in Boulder.

If Alternatives Inc. were to open such a unit in Billings, it would need to obtain a special review from the City Council. The council could accept or deny the application, or accept it with any number of conditions. A special review also would be needed for the assessment and sanction center, according to Nicole Cromwell, zoning coordinator with the City-County Planning Department. Both uses would be classified as privately run prisons.

That is not the case, however, with pre-release centers. In the South 27th Street corridor, which is zoned commercial, Alternatives Inc. could convert the Howard Johnson building to a pre-release center with no restrictions or prior approval.

If all three programs were placed in the building, there would be as many as 155 women housed there on three floors. There would also be offices for counselors and other employees, as well as some new administrative offices, including Armstrong's.

Armstrong said women in the meth treatment unit would undergo six to nine months of treatment, followed by six months in pre-release. The first floor would house women in pre-release, meaning they would be allowed to go out during the day for work or classes.

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The second floor and third floors, housing the meth unit and the assessment center, would be locked down, with security screening inside the windows. The screens would not be visible from the street and the only fencing would enclose a small area behind the building where pre-release residents could gather, Armstrong said.

He said Alternatives Inc. has agreed not to make any other cosmetic changes to the facade of the building, and earlier plans to enclose the outside entryway have been abandoned. Instead, Armstrong said, a small sally port will be added onto the south side of the building, where prisoners can be picked up and dropped off.

Armstrong said there would be little incentive for anyone to escape from any part of the building, since all of them will be serving limited sentences or the tail end of longer sentences, making the risk of being sent back to prison enough to control their behavior. He said the three floors would be kept strictly separate, and all residents would be tested regularly for drugs.

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map of correction
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centers on
the South Side
(pdf)

"These are people, quite honestly, who are pretty good people when they're not drunk or on drugs," he said. "That's why I've been here 25 years."

Former City Councilwoman Marion Dozier, a critic of Alternatives Inc.'s plans, said the zoning code should never have been written to allow placement of a large pre-release center so close to residential areas of the South Side.

She said the South Side Task Force might want to explore seeking changes to the zoning code if it wants to bar further expansion of what has been dubbed the "correctional corridor" on South 27th.

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Corrections facility plan sparks outcry

By ED KEMMICK
Of The Gazette Staff

Marion Dozier thinks the city of Billings should put up a sign to greet motorists at the 27th Street exit off Interstate 90. It would read: "Welcome to Deer Lodge East."

Deer Lodge, 40 miles west of Butte, is home to Montana State Prison. South 27th Street is home to the Montana Women's Prison, the Billings office of the Adult Probation and Parole Bureau and the Ted Lechner Youth Services Center, a jail for young offenders.

The latest proposal for South 27th, the one that prompted Dozier to suggest the "Deer Lodge East" sign, is to transform the Howard Johnson Express Inn at 1001 S. 27th St. into a combination pre-release center, prison diversion program and methamphetamine treatment unit.

If those plans go through, the building could house as many as 155 women. That would bring to about 1,800 the number of people incarcerated, detained or supervised by the Department of Corrections on an eight-block stretch of South 27th Street.

That's what alarms people like Dozier, a former City Council member and former chairwoman of the South Side Task Force. Testifying before the City Council on Jan. 8, Dozier said opposition to the proposed conversion of the Howard Johnson building wasn't a question of "not in my backyard."

"This," she said, "is an our-back-yard-is-full issue."

Jim Ronquillo, the newly elected Ward 1 representative on the City Council, also thinks the South Side is being asked to bear more than its share of institutions. He said it's not just correctional buildings that are clustering on and around South 27th Street.

Deering Clinic, a public health clinic, is expanding its campus at South 27th and First Avenue South, and the Montana Rescue Mission is planning to build a shelter, consolidating its services for men, women and families, just east of Deering Clinic. The Department of Motor Vehicles shares a building with the Highway Patrol across Sixth Avenue South from the Women's Prison. And as Ronquillo and others pointed out at the Jan. 8 council meeting, the Yellowstone County jail is also located on the South Side, not far from South 27th on King Avenue East.

"We all know there's a need for these facilities, but does it always have to be on our end of town?" Ronquillo asked.

Valarie Weber, director of the county's Youth Services Center, which was one of the first correctional centers to locate near South 27th Street, supports Alternative Inc.'s proposal. Weber, who is also on the Governor's Advisory Council on Corrections, said it only makes sense to have related service providers in one area, to make it easier to share resources and improve access.

At the same time, she said, it's not fair for people elsewhere in Billings to simply assume that all such services belong on the South Side.

"When institutions try to open programs in other parts of the community, they're shut down pretty quickly," she said. The reason is simple. Most other neighborhoods, unlike the South Side, have "the money, the influence and the clout," she said.

Ronquillo and Dozier mentioned the case of the six-person youth group home that Rimrock Foundation wanted to put in a Locust Street house last spring. Neighbors in the relatively well-off neighborhood raised an outcry, posting signs, calling meetings and buying a full-page ad in The Gazette.

Related Stories

Alternatives Inc. plans

Under intense pressure, Rimrock Foundation pulled its plans to use the house on Locust and went looking for another location. And yet people wonder, Dozier said, why residents of the South Side are leery of playing host to hundreds of prisoners and many hundreds of probationers and parolees.

growth of pre-release facilities, services

South 27th never planned as corrections alley

Ronquillo finds it particularly galling when he's told that the institutions on South 27th aren't close to residential neighborhoods. He has lived in the family home at South 28th Street and 10th Avenue South since 1955 - barely a block and a half from the Howard Johnson motel and about four blocks from the Women's Prison.

The South Side has been working hard to make the area attractive to families, he said, pointing to projects like the one proposed for the vacant lots across South 28th from his house, where a Missoula-based nonprofit group is planning to build a 20-unit affordable-housing complex.

South Side Task Force Chairman Bill Kelly said the issue "really hits home" with members of the task force, many of whom said they feared for the safety of children in the neighborhood. Kelly also serves on the board of the Friendship House of Christian Service at 3123 Eighth Ave. S., which operates a popular summer enrichment program.

Kids enrolled in the program take part in a summer lunch program on the east side of South Park, just a block off South 27th, Kelly said, setting the stage for possible encounters between children and people from the various institutions on that street.

"It only takes one angry person to hurt one child," Kelly said.

David Armstrong, the administrator of Alternatives Inc., said he would like to have a chance to show that his organization would fit in.

"The hard part is proving you're a good neighbor without being a neighbor," he said. "We think we'd be a great neighbor to the South Side."

He said the Howard Johnson site looked like the perfect spot for what Alternatives Inc. is planning. Many of the women who would be in the pre-release portion of the building would work downtown, and everybody in the building would be using services provided by Deering Clinic, the Mental Health Center, the county courthouse and adult education courses offered through School District 2, all of which are downtown or on South 27th.

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Click here for a detailed map of correction facilities and treatment centers on the South Side (pdf)

"If you were to go down the list of things you'd look for, it's all there," he said. "This wasn't some random thing."

He said he thought it helped that Alternatives Inc. proposed putting only women in the building and that the building was on the east side of 27th, separated by a busy street from the more residential areas west of there. He said he would also be open to a couple of suggestions raised at a task force meeting - that Alternatives Inc. consider making space available for a volunteer cop shop and consider using some of the vacant land behind the building for a community garden.

And he said people on the South Side should talk to neighbors of Alternatives Inc. at First Avenue North and North 31st Street, where it has been for 25 years.

"You won't find neighbors here that have any issue with us at all," he said.

Lisa Harmon, operations director for the Downtown Billings Partnership, said she has never heard a complaint about Alternatives Inc. from downtown business owners.

"It's not ever been on the radar screen," she said. "It hasn't been a consideration."

John Brewer, president of the Billings Area Chamber of Commerce, whose building sits between the Women's Prison and the Howard Johnson motel, said he wrote a letter in support of the Alternatives Inc. proposal, at the request of the chamber's board of directors.

"We didn't want to be viewed as an organization that didn't want to see it in our back yard," he said. A big consideration was Alternatives Inc.'s intention to maintain "a friendly appearance" on the exterior of the Howard Johnson building, Brewer said.

Ideally, there might be a different mix of businesses on South 27th, Brewer said, but entertainment and lodging businesses didn't do well there, and the void was gradually filled by institutions. He said those businesses, like any other group of related businesses, just naturally "cluster together."

At any rate, he said, the chamber is happy to be on South 27th and has no plans to move.

"I still think it's a great place to do business. ? There's still a tremendous amount of traffic that flows by this business," he said.

Dozier, who worked for nine years as a life-skills attendant at a minimum-security women's correctional center in Lockwood that predated the prison on South 27th, doesn't dispute that Montana needs meth-treatment centers, or that Billings might be a good place to put one. Her concern, she said, "is how people look at our neighborhood."

If Howard Johnson couldn't make it, she said, does that mean the War Bonnet Inn, just off the interstate on South 27th, will be the next location for some kind of correctional building?

"How much is enough?" she said. "How much do you put in an area before you don't put them anywhere else?"

Contact Ed Kemmick at ekemmick@billingsgazette.com or 657-1293.

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Alabama prisons close to crisis

January 9, 2006

Alabama's prison system is broken. Unless the Legislature musters the political will to fix it, the state could soon face a major crisis.

The form that crisis will take is anybody's guess. It could be a major riot that results in the deaths of inmates and Corrections officers. It could be another major release of inmates ordered by a federal judge. It could be an increase in escapes that place the public at risk. It could be the continued loss of Corrections officers and inability to recruit and train their replacements fast enough to keep the system viable.

Whatever form it takes, the likelihood of a crisis of some sort grows each year that the Legislature does not face reality.

That reality includes the fact that Alabama for years has squeezed far more prisoners into facilities than they were designed to hold. As of November, there were almost twice as many inmates in facilities than they were originally designed to contain.

Even the state's maximum security prisons, where the most dangerous prisoners are likely to be housed, are at about 175 percent of design capacity.

In addition, the number of state prisoners remaining in county jails for longer than 30 days after they are supposed to be moved to the prison system violates a standing court order, and it is likely a judge will soon order some relief for the overcrowded jails.

Those who think the Corrections Department can continue to squeeze ever-growing numbers of prisoners into the system without inviting disaster probably don't understand that many of the easy reforms already have been made.

The Corrections Department already has one of the lowest per-prisoner costs in the nation at \$12,030 per year. It already generates millions of dollars of its annual operating costs from prison industries. It already has boot camps for appropriate inmates. It already has work release centers. The state already has sped up the parole process, even to the point of naming a second parole board.

But there are solutions, even solutions that will not require spending hundred of millions of dollars to build new prisons and hundred of millions more each year to operate them.

A task force appointed by Gov. Bob Riley has recommended a range of reforms that include:

- Sentencing guidelines for the state's judges that would reduce minimum sentence ranges for drug crimes by about 30 percent and for property crimes by about 20 percent. This reform measure, which would allow shorter sentences for nonviolent criminals, has been before the Legislature several times before. It has passed the House, but been bottled up in the dysfunctional Senate.
- The creation of three prerelease work centers where inmates could receive training to help them exist on the outside without returning to crime. This would include intensive drug counseling and

vocational training.

- The creation of at least one Technical Violators' Center. Currently about 40 percent of parolees returned to prison have not committed new crimes, but only a "technical violation" such as failing to pay court-ordered restitution. This proposal would allow judges the option of sending technical violators for 60 to 90 days of treatment and counseling instead of using valuable prisons beds needed for more dangerous inmates.
- The expansion of community corrections programs. Twenty-five such programs already operate successfully to serve 34 counties, but the Legislature needs to provide the funding to expand them to serve every community in the state that can be persuaded to join in a cooperative venture.

These proposals make sense. Legislators should not allow election-year posturing keep them from adopting these reasonable and cost-effective measures to help address prison overcrowding.

This is the second of a four-part series on issues facing the Legislature in the session that opens Tuesday. Tomorrow: Medicaid and the General Fund budget.

Charleston Daily Mail

New prison needed in W.Va., officials say

Lawrence Messina
The Associated Press

Monday January 09, 2006

West Virginia needs a new 1,200-bed prison to ease crowding in its corrections system, and should not rule out having it privately built and run, state officials said.

Lawmakers were also advised to fund three 48-bed work camps to house the state's least-dangerous prisoners, in the report issued to joint interim committees by the state Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety.

The camps would cost \$1.2 million each, while the new prison would cost between \$105 million and \$120 million, said Norb Federspiel, director of the Division of Criminal Justice Services.

The report further recommended sentencing third-offense drunken driving offenders to the state's regional jails instead of prisons, though those felons would continue to serve terms of up to three years.

"I know this would mean a big policy change. Felonies usually go to prison and misdemeanors to jail," said Federspiel, representing MAPS Secretary Jim Spears at the meeting. "It's a change in philosophy, but it's something you need to look at."

West Virginia has one of the nation's smallest inmate populations, per-capita, but its rate of growth is among the most rapid, state and federal officials say.

The Mountain State counted 272 imprisoned felons for every 100,000 residents in 2004, according to the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics. Only 10 states had a lower incarceration rate that year. The national average is 486 inmates per 100,000 residents.

But West Virginia ranked 3rd for the growth of its state prisoner population between 1995 and last year. Its incarceration rate rose by 73.3 percent during that time, while the national rate grew by less than 13 percent.

The increase has left the Division of Corrections with 5,312 felons sentenced to prison as of Dec. 30, but only 4,159 prison beds. The difference leaves 1,276 felons serving their sentences in the state's regional jails.

While the state plans to add 728 beds to the system by January 2007, including 592 for men, the report cites estimates that corrections will have more than 6,000 inmates by 2010.

Finding the money would be the biggest obstacle to adding a prison, and the needed staff, the report said. Contracting with a private prison company brings its own drawbacks, even if the prison is built with private funds, Federspiel noted.

"There is no consensus literature citing the merits or disadvantages of private prisons," he said. "And in terms of liability, you can have all the nice little clauses to hold the state harmless, but you're still on the hook for these people."

The reports' other recommendations include increased funding for community corrections, greater use of probation and home confinement and beefing up the ranks and pay of parole officers.

The report does not recommend that West Virginia send inmates out-of-state, as that measure would require a constitutional amendment.

A dark banner advertisement for Toshiba. On the left, there is a close-up, high-contrast image of a laptop's hinge and keyboard area. To the right of the image, the text "Save up to 20%" is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below this, in a smaller white font, it says "when you customize select notebooks." In the top right corner of the banner, the "TOSHIBA" logo is visible in white, with "Toshiba" in a smaller font underneath it.

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Packed prisons, elusive reforms State's inmate population soars as governor's promised overhaul of parole system fails to materialize

James Sterngold, Mark Martin, Chronicle Staff Writers

Friday, January 27, 2006

Despite Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's promise of major parole reforms to reduce California's spiraling prison population, the number of inmates has soared to a record high as the parole programs have floundered, and the state says overcrowding will get much worse.

In early 2004, the Schwarzenegger administration said the governor's programs, which emphasized treatment and rehabilitation of some nonviolent parole violators rather than re-incarceration, would reduce what was then a statewide inmate population of 161,000 to 148,390 by mid-2005.

Instead, many of the parole programs were either gutted or never implemented fully, while more criminals were sentenced to prison by county judges. As a result, the inmate count has rocketed to a record 168,000, nearly double the capacity of the state's 33 prisons — in spite of the fact that just last year the state finished a decades-long construction program that resulted in 22 new prisons.

In his latest budget, which calls for a \$600 million increase in corrections spending to \$7.9 billion, Schwarzenegger projects that the inmate count will rise even further, to 171,000 inmates this year, which experts say is overwhelming many treatment and training programs.

Aggravating the crisis is the fact that the prison system suffers from soaring vacancy rates in key jobs, including guards, nurses and doctors.

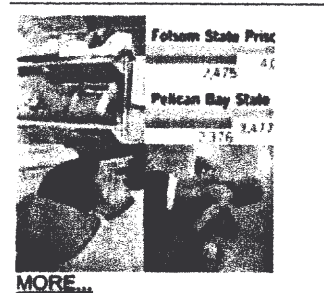
"This is about the failure, and I underline and emphasize the word failure, of this administration to manage its prison population," said state Sen. Gloria Romero, chairwoman of a committee that oversees the corrections system. She singled out the failed parole programs as a key factor. "It's not something magical, and it's not sudden."

The vast overcrowding is so bad that John Dovey, director of adult institutions in the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said in an internal memo to the department's secretary in October that the system was in a "population crisis." He said he was ordering "unprecedented" emergency steps to alleviate the strain, such as rapidly moving some inmates from one prison to another to seek out empty beds.

"We believe that an imminent and substantial threat to the public safety exists requiring immediate action," Dovey wrote.

The corrections department places the blame on prosecutors and the courts.

"The courts make their decision, and we have to deal with them," said J.P. Tremblay, the chief spokesman for the corrections department. "The people of California have said they want these people locked up, and we have to deal with it."



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Tremblay said that, at best, the corrections department expects the inmate population growth rate to level off slightly in coming years, but the overall numbers will not decline.

One result of the bulging prison population is that, in his recent proposal for a huge state construction program, Schwarzenegger suggested spending \$13.1 billion to build 83,000 new cells, some in prisons and some in county jails, over the next decade.

Democrats complained this week that Schwarzenegger has largely abandoned the rehabilitation efforts, which, they argue, would lower the inmate population and alleviate the need for more prisons.

"Where is the plan to reduce recidivism?" said Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, who oversaw a legislative hearing Wednesday on the new prison construction plan. "Instead, it's 'Let's spend money on more cells.'"

In the short term, the state has been left to improvise emergency solutions to the overcrowding, Tremblay said. In his budget, Schwarzenegger said the corrections department will have to contract with privately run prisons and county jails for 8,500 additional beds as a temporary measure to handle the inmate overflow by the end of the next fiscal year.

For now, nearly every prison gym is filled with bunks. Chuckawalla Valley State Prison near Blythe, for instance, is operating at 234 percent of its capacity; the reception center for newly convicted inmates at High Desert State Prison near Susanville is holding more than five times the number for which it was designed.

California continues to suffer from one of the worst recidivism rates in the country, 60 percent. Inmate violence is up at the same time that many prisoners are jammed into small spaces, and essential services, such as health care, are breaking down. A federal district court judge has ordered a takeover of the billion-dollar-a-year prison health care system because of what he has described as its shocking deterioration.

Romero, D-Los Angeles, said that, because the problems have only gotten worse under Schwarzenegger, she may try to prevent the reconfirmation of the corrections department's secretary, Roderick Hickman, at hearings likely to begin next month.

"That's what the power of confirmation hearings is all about," said Romero.

Prison officials concede that one reason for the expensive overcrowding is the scarcity of programs for treating parole violators — many of whom have drug-related problems.

As of June 30 of last year, the latest period for which figures are available, 58,356 parolees either were returned to prison or were being reviewed for violations, according to the department's figures; that is almost unchanged from 58,042 around the time Schwarzenegger took office.

The state pays an estimated \$1.5 billion a year for parolees returned to prison. At one time, parole reform was considered one of the most promising ways to reduce the prison population. Most other states are far ahead of California in reducing their recidivism rates through rehabilitation and parole diversion programs.

Michael Bien is a lawyer who successfully represented California parolees in a class-action lawsuit against the state that required the implementation of the new parole programs. He said the state had reneged on its promises and that court action was a possibility because of the repeated failures of the Schwarzenegger administration to fulfill the terms of the court settlement.

"We thought, based on what they told us, that the programs would be implemented by September or October at the latest," said Bien. "But they tell us they have made very little progress. There is a real breakdown in the system."

Things were not supposed to go this way.

On his first full day in office, Schwarzenegger appointed Hickman, an advocate of reform, to lead the corrections department. And Hickman spoke at several state Senate hearings early in 2004 at which he enthusiastically embraced a series of programs, called "the new parole model," that promised to divert many parole violators to three programs — two involving drug treatment and the use of halfway houses, one involving electronic monitoring and home detention of violators.

One of Hickman's first acts in office was to settle Bien's class-action suit against the state claiming the parole system was flawed and unfair. Under the terms of the consent decree, the state was required to institute the parole diversion programs, among other measures.

But, under pressure from victims' rights groups and the guards union, Hickman abruptly abandoned the diversion programs in April. He said they were not working, but he also admitted that they had never been fully implemented.

A federal judge angrily ordered that the state reinstate the programs, but corrections officials concede that they are still months away from that goal.

Use of the diversion programs was cut by 76 percent in 2005, even though corrections officials say they are working to expand them. They handle a minuscule fraction of the roughly 115,000 former inmates on parole.

For instance, in December 2004, 1,816 parolees were undergoing drug treatment in county jails or living at halfway homes providing treatment, two of the parole reforms begun earlier in 2004. By December 2005, only 429 parolees were in the same programs, according to the department's population reports.

In many regions, the programs were barely used at all. For example, more than 6,000 parolees in the Central Valley region faced parole revocations for violating conditions of their release; only 18 were in the two types of diversion programs.

Bien, the attorney for parolees, said that what is puzzling about the state's failure is that everyone acknowledges that solid programs for parolees and parole violators have proven to be highly successful in many states. They save money by keeping large numbers of men out of prison, and they increase public safety, he said.

Jim L'Etoile, head of the corrections department's parole division, said the department only recently had completed training parole agents to use one of the new tools, electronic monitoring devices for in-home detention. The department hopes to have 2,000 in place by mid-2006, but "only a handful" are in use now, he said.

The department has about 200 beds in county jails available for drug rehabilitation, and L'Etoile said the plan was to have 570 spots available sometime in 2006.

He insisted that the new programs were better than the ones shut down earlier. For instance, the drug treatment programs will last 60 days, not 30, and provide for more follow-up.

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Motherhood behind bars

By Wendy Harris

Post-Crescent staff writer January 15, 2006

FOND DU LAC — Less than a year ago, Samantha Luther entered prison stressed, depressed and three months pregnant.

As a convicted drug offender who violated her probation, she faced a year's hard time, with three months credit for sitting in the Waushara County Jail.

"I don't know what went wrong with me," said Luther, a petite, 21-year-old who began wearing prison "greens" when most of her peers were wearing new college sweatshirts. "I had a good childhood, but I felt useless and out of place."

Last March, Luther, a Menasha native, joined more than 700 inmates at Taycheedah Correctional Institution near Fond du Lac, the state's largest prison for women. Female prisoners still remain a minuscule fraction of the population — just under 1 percent of the U.S. female population — but their numbers are growing.

Nearly 1,300 female offenders are serving time in Wisconsin's prison system, a number that has increased fivefold in the past 15 years, according to the state Department of Corrections. With nearly 22,000 adults serving prison terms in Wisconsin, women account for 6 percent.

The U.S. Department of Justice says the number of women in prison jumped from about 12,000 in 1980 to about 105,000 in 2004.

Criminologists, sociologists and advocates attribute the burgeoning female inmate population nationwide to the war on drugs and tougher sentencing laws. But the get-tough laws meant to catch kingpins have instead snared thousands of low-level offenders — including women.



⊕ zoom

Samantha Luther holds photos of her sons Rhylee and Jayden on Dec. 29 in her room at John C. Burke Correctional Center in Waupun where she was transferred after Rhylee was born. She gave birth Sept. 6 while she was an inmate at Taycheedah Correctional Institution near Fond du Lac, the state's largest prison for women. Luther was separated from her son within a day of his birth. Post-Crescent photo by Sharon Cekada

State initiatives for prison parents

Kids First: The Governor's Plan to Invest in Wisconsin's Future, includes initiatives to "break the cycle of incarceration."

Among them:

- Implement an enhanced community transition program for nonviolent female offenders with children to help them succeed after their release from prison.
- Expand and modify the Female Alternative to Prison program and give offenders with children priority placement. The intensive drug treatment and supervision program helps offenders find jobs.
- Provide financial help to relatives caring for the children.
- Form partnerships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations that offer mentoring programs and support services for children.
- Establish a resource center for the children.
- Enhance and expand parenting education for prisoners.

Source: Gov. Jim Doyle's office

On the Web: The complete Kids First report:
www.wisgov.state.wi.us/docs/kidsfirst.pdf

And after two decades of women crowding into state and federal prisons, corrections officials are grappling with the implications: Two-thirds of female prisoners leave behind minor children. Most are single moms, with an average of two kids, who were the custodial parent before they were arrested. Most plan to reunite with their children when they get out, advocates say.

Meanwhile, about 5 percent of female inmates enter prison pregnant.

An incarcerated woman may be guilty, but her children are innocent. But they, invariably, also will pay for her crime. For babies born to incarcerated women in Wisconsin, the mother-child bond may never take root.

Older children, meanwhile, experience the trauma of separation. They face shame, sadness, social stigma and the upheaval of moving in with relatives or family friends. In about 10 percent of cases, children will be handed over to the foster care system.

Research shows that these kids are more likely to wet their beds, have problems in school, abuse drugs and join gangs. And they are five times more likely to end up in the correction system as adults.

For decades in this country, female and male inmates — officially — have been treated equally in prisons designed for violent men. But experts and advocates say this one-size-fits-all approach has short-changed women offenders, and ultimately, their children. And society ends up paying the price.

"The male model of incarceration is particularly difficult and harsh for women, because it doesn't consider the parenting issues," said Stephanie Covington, co-director of the Center for Gender and Justice in La Jolla, Calif. "Yet men get many more programs than women do."

Things are starting to change in Wisconsin.

As part of Gov. Jim Doyle's Kids First Campaign, launched in 2004, inmates and their children are getting new consideration. The state Department of Corrections last summer announced it was reorganizing to create a separate and single operational structure for female inmates. It is now in the planning phase of developing and enhancing programs it hopes will help break the cycle of incarceration and help female offenders mend their broken lives.

"What we are looking to do, in the long run, is reduce the number of children who grow up and commit offenses," said state Corrections Secretary Matt Frank. "We've realized we needed a more dedicated approach to dealing with female offenders."

On the Web

State Department of Corrections: www.wi-doc.com



Taycheedah Correctional Institution:

www.wi-doc.com/taycheed.htm

"Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders," a report commissioned by the National Institute of Corrections:

<http://nicic.org/Library/018017>

More on this topic

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'I'm so scared'

As she acclimated to life at Taycheedah, Luther's biggest worry was she would lose the baby she carried.

Her first, Jayden, now being cared for by Luther's older sister, was born prematurely. Luther worried preterm labor would hit again. Jayden, who was born after she got out of jail the first time, weighed less than 4 pounds.

"I'm so scared," said Luther, six months pregnant, during a prison interview last July at Taycheedah. "If I have cramps or concerns, it takes a day or two to hear anything back and it could be too late."

When a Taycheedah inmate has a health concern, she writes it down on a slip of paper that is delivered to the health services unit. She then waits to hear back.

The dozen Taycheedah nurses and the facility's doctor get up to 800 medical requests per week from inmates. Sifting out valid health concerns from the chronic complainers can be tedious.

Luther was worried, too, she wasn't gaining enough weight. Every time nausea and vomiting set in — which she said lasted several months — she lost weight.

At 5-foot-2, Luther said she normally weighed 122 pounds.

Four months into her pregnancy, she weighed 109 pounds; at six months, only 121 pounds.

"That's bad and I'm scared. I am hungry all the time."

At Taycheedah, pregnant prisoners are given an extra snack bag in the evening, which includes milk, bread, crackers and a piece of fruit. It wasn't enough, she said. So she relied on other women to share food with her.

Luther acknowledged, however, that her developing fetus would reap one large benefit from her incarceration: a drug-free womb. She was participating in Taycheedah's alcohol and drug abuse rehabilitation program.

"As bad as it is here, it was meant to be," she said. "I'm in a great (drug rehabilitation) program."

Second chance unravels

Luther started dabbling in drugs and alcohol at 15, she said. She got in with the wrong crowd, dropped out Menasha High School in 10th grade and when she was 18 she was busted for marijuana possession.

"The majority of women who come into prison are in for nonviolent offenses, most typically property and drug offenses," Frank said.

Nationally, nearly a third of female offenders in prisons committed drug crimes, according to

the Justice Department. The number of women incarcerated for drug offenses rose nearly tenfold from 1986 to 1996.

Meanwhile, 29 percent of female inmates are in for property crimes and 6 percent for public order violations — prostitution, drunken driving or probation violations among others.

About a third of female inmates are in for violent crimes compared with just more than half of all male inmates. Three-fourths of violent female offenders commit simple assaults, considered the lowest level of violent crimes.

After Luther got out of jail the first time, she vowed to clean up and pull her life together. She moved back in with her mom, gave birth to Jayden, and shortly thereafter landed a job waiting tables. She moved into her own apartment.

"I had my own apartment, me and Jayden were living together, I had my own job, it was beautiful," she said. "I was supporting him and me."

Then things quickly unraveled. The restaurant was sold to a new owner, who hired a new wait staff, she said. She was out of money, she lost her apartment and her stress was mounting. She left her baby with her mom for the weekend while she looked for a new job and place to live.

"My sister showed up and took him," Luther said. "She felt I wasn't being a good mom, that I was an unfit parent. ... Then I started using again." Her sister eventually won guardianship of the boy.

Luther skipped her probation appointments; a warrant was issued for her arrest. Soon after, police found her at her new boyfriend's home. The judge gave her a 12-month sentence.

"I messed up," Luther said.

Gender differences behind bars

In the tightly controlled world of prison life, gender differences are especially pronounced.

"Men are more concrete and factual, and women are more relationship oriented," said Ana Boatwright, Taycheedah's warden since 2004, who was promoted last summer to oversee the reorganized female system. "Women come in with issues of victimization and they probably have been abused. They are fairly upfront about their offenses."

In general, men learn the rules and keep their mouths shut. Women, meanwhile, question them and talk back. When men don't like prison conditions, they riot. Women complain.

During the 1990s, research began revealing the differences between male and female inmates. Statistics and studies documented not only the crimes women commit, but also the different physical and psychological needs women bring to prison.

"Women's pathways into the criminal justice system are largely addiction and trying to survive from poverty and abuse," said Covington, who is also a co-author of the 2003 report "Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders."

The report, commissioned by the National Institute of Corrections, has served as a roadmap for many prison systems around the country as they make reforms to deal with women's needs. Wisconsin is using it, too.

"This is what we will be using to review and revise all of our procedures, programs and services — everything we do," Boatwright said.

The report confirms what Boatwright says she's seen in her 20-year career in corrections.

Most female offenders are poor, undereducated and unskilled, and disproportionately women of color.

An estimated 80 percent of female offenders enter prison with substance abuse issues, the report found. Physical and sexual abuse are rampant in their histories — about 40 percent report having been abused, compared to 9 percent of men. And a quarter of them suffer from mental illness, most commonly depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Taycheedah has the highest ratio of mentally ill offenders of all the state's 19 adult correctional institutions. About half of its inmates arrive on prescription medication for psychological disorders.

Female inmates also have more health care needs and associated costs than men. (Wisconsin spends an average of \$27,000 a year per adult inmate.) They need pap smears, mammograms and, in the case of the pregnant prisoner, prenatal, obstetrical and postpartum care. They also have higher incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection.

The state plans to do a better job addressing all of these needs, Frank said.

"Typically, women prisoners suffer from a poor health history, drug abuse, a history of sexual and/or physical abuse and mental illness," he said. "We are employing assessment and evaluation tools that are specific to women."

What about the children?

Of all the issues that women bring to prison, one of the most difficult is their extreme worry about their children, advocates and criminologists say. And their longing to be with them.

More than half of the children of female prisoners will never visit their mothers while they are incarcerated, studies show.

"Most prisons are located in rural areas, so you have the cost and time involved for family members coming to these rural areas," said Covington said.

Caregivers, also, may be unable or unwilling to bring the children for visits.

Visits themselves present their own challenges. The prison setting can be scary for children, while the routine strip searches can be traumatizing for an inmate.

"A lot of these women have been physically and sexually abused, and when you leave the visiting room you often have to have a body cavity search, Covington say. "Some women say,

"I can't do this anymore."

At Taycheedah, inmates are allowed up to four visits per week, with only one visit per weekend, lasting up to three hours on weekdays and up to two hours per weekend and holiday. The meetings take place in a large, gymnasium-sized hall filled with chairs, coffee tables and a carpeted area with toys and books for children. The state does not allow conjugal visits.

A privileged few — those mothers who have completed Taycheedah's parenting program and have good prison records — get to have daylong visits with their kids at Doty House, a historical home in the center of Taycheedah's campus. The state hopes to expand this extended visiting program to its three other minimum-security prisons for women.

Luther didn't get to have either type of visit. Her sister refused to bring her son, she said.

"I think about him every day," she said. "He must have at least 50 to 80 cards from me."

Luther gave birth to her second boy Sept. 6, one of 20 babies born to Taycheedah inmates last year. She named him Rhylee. After the 18 hours she had with him in the hospital, she didn't get to see him again. Luther's boyfriend wasn't allowed on her visiting list, and no one else was willing to bring the baby, she said.

Her depression only worsened, she said.

Shortly after Rhylee's birth, Luther was transferred from Taycheedah to the John C. Burke Correctional Center in Waupun, one of the state's three minimum-security prisons for women.

As she counted down the months, the number of pictures of Rhylee and Jayden, sent by her dad and her boyfriend, grew. She posted them on the bulletin board in the small cell she shared with another inmate.

"I'm scared," she said, in advance of her release two weeks ago. "I have to take on all this responsibility after laying around doing nothing."

Another chance at motherhood

Just as they had talked about for months, Luther's boyfriend arrived on that Tuesday morning at Burke. After stopping for an appointment with her probation officer, the couple drove to Wild Rose, where she will live with her boyfriend, his parents and Rhylee, now 4 months old.

"I hugged and kissed him all over," said Luther, of her reunion with Rhylee. "He's a big baby and very spoiled."

She and her boyfriend plan to marry, she said. He has a good job in construction and recently purchased a house for them that he's remodeling, she said.

Luther will remain under state supervision for a year. She will have to check in with her probation officer twice a month and participate in an outpatient drug-treatment program. She also said she will look for a job.

It all feels overwhelming to her.

"Sometimes, I just have to get away and sit in my room," she said.

But mostly, she just wants to bond with her two children and regain custody of Jayden.

As hard as prison is, being released also can be terrifying for women, said Debbie Lassiter, of the Convergence Resource Center, a Milwaukee-based nonprofit agency that opened in 2004 to help female inmates transition into society upon their release.

"When they were ready to get out, they started coming up to us saying, 'I'm getting released in 30 days and I'm scared to death,'" said Lassiter, who spent years as a prison volunteer, teaching Bible study to female inmates. "Women were crying out saying there were no services to help them."

So she and a handful of other volunteers on a shoestring budget help women develop jobs skills, find housing and home furnishings, get substance abuse treatment and reunite with their children, among other services.

"If a man gets released from prison, you are dealing with a man," Lassiter said. "When a women gets released from prison, you are dealing with the woman, her children and the family related to her."

The state, too, is acknowledging the need for these "wrap-around" services. It plans to expand its parenting and education programs for women inmates. Last fall, it launched the female re-entry program, a pilot project that — like the Convergence Resource Center — helps women being released from prison. The program is collaboration between corrections, the state's Workforce Development and the Department of Family and Health Services.

The budget implications of the state's changes are unclear for now, Frank said. Many things may not cost more money, but will amount to doing things differently, Frank said. But the long-term goal is to save money and lives.

"The idea with Kids First," Franks said, "is let's invest money early on and work on prevention and early intervention so these kids won't grow up to be involved in the criminal justice system."

"That's money well spent."